

Written Testimony for the Montgomery County Council for the Hearings on Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget

Council President Glass, Council Vice President Friedson, and Councilmembers:

My name is Paul Holmes, father of two MCPS graduates and a long-time resident of Silver Spring. For most of that time, I have been proud of Montgomery County's so-called "progressive" traditions. We've made progress working through our county's troubling racial history, including: lynchings; segregated schools, lunch counters and swimming pools; redlining, racial covenants and other discriminatory housing practices; and police misconduct. Still, much work remains before Montgomery County can be justly proud of our preferred "progressive" moniker.

Such is the case with several aspects of the proposed budget for 2024. I want to register my position on three budget items that have deep racial equity and justice overtones:

- First, I strongly oppose the proposed huge 36% increase to the new MCPD Community Resources Program. I'm all for more funding for summer camps and increased opportunities for our youth, but we can do that better through increased investments in qualified organizations like Montgomery County's Recreation Department. Similarly, I'm all for increasing trust between police and the community, but that is better accomplished through a sincere commitment by MCPD to reduce its use of force and stop opposing increased transparency and accountability. The Community Resources Program is a costly and blatant public relations sales-job that helps conceal police misconduct and that will not make our communities safer.
- Second, over the past three years the county has made an all-too-timid effort to expand use of Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams (MCOTs) to assist those experiencing mental or behavioral health crises. In the face of both dramatically increased use of force by MCPD and overwhelming and compelling evidence demonstrating the effectiveness, safety and substantial cost-savings of MCOT-like approaches, so far, the county has delivered only a tiny fraction of the teams needed to serve the high demand within the county. Predictably, that lack of follow-through has defaulted to responses by armed police who are ill-equipped and who have been very clear that they don't want to respond to such calls. The County must incentivize recruitment and otherwise redouble its efforts to urgently and dramatically expand Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams and provide real 24/7 coverage for the whole County.
- Third, being serious about strengthening student safety and academic performance means that Montgomery County needs to reduce police presence in our schools and instead, greatly increase our investments in other proven, more effective and less harmful approaches to school safety such as nurses, mental health practitioners, social workers,

counselors, and specialists trained in trauma and restorative justice practices. Last year's effort to upgrade those support services through Wellness Centers is a much-appreciated start that now needs to be expanded to cover our middle schools as well as our county's high schools.

We can and must do better to support the people of Montgomery County and to earn the progressive reputation.

Thank you.